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The Peerless Series
No. 71

Once Upon a Midnight

A Dramatization of Poe's "Raven"

By Vincent P. Sullivan



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Stanton Amusement Co., Norwich, N. Y.

Once Upon a Midnight

A Dramatization of Poe's "Raven"

By Vincent P. Sullivan

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F R A N K J. S T A N T O N

Norwich, New York

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Once Upon a Midnight

SYNOPSIS

This one act play, a dramatization of Edgar Allan Poe's celebrated poem, "The Raven," tells the story of a remorseful young Student who suffered his true love to die of a broken heart. The action takes place "ONCE UPON A MIDNIGHT," exactly one year after the awful event, that frightful night in bleak December, when the lovely Lenore perished in the storm, killed by the cruelty of her lover. The Student is discovered poring over his books in an effort to banish his dreadful memories, when, in the lull of the storm, a queer tapping is heard. He traces this tapping to his window, and opening it, a "stately Raven of the saintly days of yore" stalks in and alights on the bust of Pallas over the door. Out of sheer curiosity he addresses the Raven and is surprised and terrified to receive a reply. He questions it frantically but to all queries it has but one answer, "Never, nevermore." These replies are made by Voice of the Night, the character visible to the audience but unseen by the Student. Exhausted, the Student sinks into a dream. In this dream the troupe of dancing children, garbed as angels, enter, swinging incense and laying a path of roses, whereupon, presently enters the Spirit of Lenore. She sings "Lenore's Answer" and in a dim light disappears. The Student awakens from his dream and begs the Raven to tell "it within the distant heaven he shall clasp the sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore." But to all his pleading; and entreaties the terrible verdict remains, "Nevermore." Infuriated, the wretched youth hurls the lighted lamp at the offending Raven, and daybreak reveals the lifeless form of the unhappy young man huddled in a corner of the room. The Spirit of Lenore again enters and sings. An encore verse and chorus is sung by the Company, with "happy ending" effect, showing that the little play was only the Student's dream.

COSTUMES

For STUDENT, general make-up of Poe in his youth.

For VOICE OF THE NIGHT, black tights and cloak.

For LENORE, flowing white robe and handsome large wings.

For DANCING CHILDREN, (3 with incense and 3 with baskets of roses,) white dresses and gum shoes. (wings not essential.)

PERMISSION

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Once Upon a Midnight

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE YOUNG STUDENT,
VOICE OF THE NIGHT,
THE SPIRIT OF LENORE,
BALLET OF DANCING CHILDREN.

SCENE--A library. Large open fireplace in which a fire is burning at R. Large doorway, with purple velvet curtains, in Flat at R of C. Above the door is a bust (cf "Pallas".) Lattice window at L 1. An invisible wife is arranged to convey an imitation raven, which seems to enter the window, to the head of the bust. Table with lighted lamp at R C. On table disordered piles of books. No lights but the lamp and the flickering light from hearth. Student, in deep thought, is discovered seated at table. At rise of curtain slight clutter of chairs and high winds of winter are heard.

VOICE OF THE NIGHT--peers through the curtains and speaks:
Once again on midnight dreary, there he ponders, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore--
Now he's nodding, nearly napping, now I'll send the fatal tapping,
Yes, like some one gently rapping, rapping at his chamber door. disappears and a tapping is heard.

STUDENT--rousing himself, in chair, **What! some visitor, some caller, tapping at my lodging door--**
Only this and nothing more. rises, starts to go to door, pauses
Ah, distinctly I remember it's the selfsame bleak December.
Then as now, each dying ember casts its ghost upon the floor.
Oh! that God would send the morrow! Vainly I have sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow--sorrow for the lost
Lenore-- takes portrait of Lenore from table
For that rare, that radiant maiden whom the angels name
Lenore--
Nameless here for evermore. goes to door--movement of curtains

Once Upon a Midnight

Ah! the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain

Thrills me, fills me with fantastic terrors never felt before.
Now I must, to still the beating of my heart, stand here repeating,

What's this visitor entreating entrance at my lodging door?
Who's this visitor entreating entrance at my lodging door?
'Tis some friend, I hope, no more.

Fears to hell! my soul grows stronger: he parts curtains and stands in hall looking L hesitate I will no longer,

Sir, I pray, or madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,

Yes, so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my lodging door, goes L behind Flat, sound of opening street door

That I scarce was sure I heard you. What! I open wide the door,

Darkness, night and nothing more.

Deep into the darkness peering, must I stand here, wondering, fearing,

Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before?

Must the silence be unbroken, must the stillness give no token?

Not a single word is spoken, not a whispered word-- sound of locking a door

VOICE OF THE NIGHT uncanny tone Lenore.

STUDENT Re-enters Who has whispered? Let the echo murmur back the word

VOICE OF THE NIGHT Lenore.

STUDENT with terror Merely this? Oh God, no more!
Half my heart is dead from yearning, all my soul within is burning, tapping is heard again

What! again I hear a tapping somewhat louder than before.
Surely that is, surely that is something at my window lattice. goes to window and opens the casement

Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore--
Let my heart be still a moment, and this mystery explore--

'Tis the wind, thank God, no more.

I'll make sure opens lattice and try the shutter. What is all

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this flirt and flutter? the wire over bust is pulled and bird
seems to fly from window and perch on bust
Heaven and earth! a stately Raven of the saintly days of
yore!
Not the least obeisance made he, not a minute stopped or
stayed he,
But, with mien or lord or lady, perched above my chamber
door.

Perch, old bird! is there no more? sits, facing the bird
Yes, this ebony bird is 'guiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum, and his eyes of blood-red
gore.

Though thy crest is shorn and shaven, thou, old bird, art
sure no craven.

Ghastly, grim, and ancient Raven, wandering from the
nightly shore,

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the night's Plutonian
shore!

Croak, sir Raven,

VOICE OF THE NIGHT Nevermore.

STUDENT Much I marvel this ungainly fowl can hear
discourse so plainly,
Though his answer little meaning, little relevancy bore.
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber
door--

Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber
door,

Croaking only "Nevermore."

Come, sir Raven, sitting lonely, why upon the bust speak
only

That one word, as if your soul in that one word you do
outpour?

Will you nothing further utter? will you not a feather
flutter?

Ah well, I myself must mutter, "Other friends have flown
before.

On the morrow you will leave me, as my friends have flown
before."

Croak, sir Raven,

VOICE OF THE NIGHT Nevermore.

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STUDENT startled How the still, dead night is broken,
by reply so aptly spoken.
And yet, doubtless what it utters is its only stock and store,
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful
disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden
bore--
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore of

VOICE OF THE NIGHT Never, nevermore.

STUDENT So, sir Raven, still beguiling my sad fancy
into smiling,
Wait! I'll wheel this cushioned seat in front of you, and
bust, and door. changes position of the chair
Here upon the velvet sinking, I'll betake myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what an ominous bird of yore,
What a grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird
of yore,
Means in croaking "Nevermore." pause
Here I sit engaged in guessing, but no syllable addressing
To this fowl whose fiery eyes now burn into my bosom's
core. pause
This and more I sit divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining, with the lamplight gloat-
ing o'er,
But whose velvet violet lining, with the lamplight gloat-
ing o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore. kisses portrait of Lenore pause
faint, soft music is heard
Ah, methinks the air grows denser, perfumed by some
unseen censor,
Swung by angels whose faint footfalls tinkle on the tufted
floor. He sleeps. Enter ballet of children, three swinging in-
cense, and three with fancy baskets of flowers. They scatter the
flowers from the door to Student's chair, making a path. They
then dance around Student and Exit. Enter SPIRIT OF LEN-
ORE over the path of flowers to Student's chair. She sings first
verse and chorus of "Lenore's Answer," and then disappears un-
der a dim light. Student awakens with a shriek.

STUDENT to Raven Wretch! Oh wretch! thy God hath
lent thee-- by these angels he hath sent thee

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Respite--respite and nepenthe from thy memories of
Lenore.

Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget the lost
Lenore.

Speak, sir Raven!

VOICE OF THE NIGHT Nevermore.

STUDENT Prophet, prophet, thing of evil!-- prophet
still, if bird or devil!

Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee
here ashore,

Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted--
On this home by horror haunted--tell me truly I implore,
Is there, is there balm in Gilead? Tell me, tell me, I im-
plore!

VOICE OF THE NIGHT Never, nevermore.

STUDENT Prophet, prophet, thing of evil! prophet
still, if bird or devil!

By that Heaven that bends above us-- by that God we both
adore--

Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant
Aidenn,

It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name
Lenore--

Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name
Lenore?

VOICE OF THE NIGHT Never, nevermore.

STUDENT in agony Be that word our sign of parting,
bird or fiend, this is the parting!

Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian
shore!

Leave no black plume as a token, of the lie thy soul hath
spoken!

Leave my loneliness unbroken! quit that bust above my
door!

Take thy beak from out my heart! take, take thy form
from off my door! he hurls the lighted lamp at the Raven.
All lights out

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VOICE OF THE NIGHT Never, nevermore. STUDENT is dead. Dim spot-light shows his lifeless form on the floor. Spot-light on curtains shows SPIRIT OF LENORE Entering. She sings second verse and chorus of "Lenore's Answer." Immediately after song, between the curtains, in the spot-light, is seen

VOICE OF THE NIGHT And the Raven, never flitting,
still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above his chamber door;
And its eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is
dreaming.
And the hearth-light o'er him streaming throws his shad-
ow on the floor;
And his soul indicating student from out the shadow that lies
floating on the floor.
Shall be lifted--nevermore!

GRAND FINALE by entire cast, singing "Happy Ending" version of "Lenore's Answer."

Our little play about Lenore
Is but a wild nightmare of yore;
For here they stand all safe and sound,--
Lenore with wedding roses crown'd.

Chorus:

Your day will come and toil will bring you glory,
When fortune's store will cheer your weary heart.
Friends come and go as this old world rolls on;
Through loss and gain, Truth will remain!
When foes are dead and gone.

CURTAIN

* *The complete words and music of "Lenore's Answer", (published by the N. Y. Trend Pub. Co., 652 39th St., Brooklyn, N. Y.,) will be sent postpaid for 25 cts by the STANTON AMUSEMENT CO., NORWICH, N. Y.

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